

Interim Progress Report

Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families

February 4, 2022



Homeland
Security



Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families Interim Progress Report

February 4, 2022

Table of Contents

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	Executive Order Language	2
III.	Recent Progress and Ongoing Efforts.....	3
IV.	Update on Task Force Data.....	6
V.	Update on Parole Requests	7
VI.	Appendix.....	8

I. Introduction

The Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families (Task Force) submits this interim report on recent progress made on the implementation of Executive Order 14011 (E.O. 14011), *Establishment of Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families*.¹ As of January 17, 2022, the Task Force has facilitated the reunification of 106 children with their separated parents in the United States and provided these families with access to behavioral health services. During the last 60 days, the Task Force made noteworthy progress in the following areas:

- Since the launch of the Task Force websites, Together.gov and Juntos.gov, 768 potentially eligible families have registered with the Task Force. Of those families, approximately 429 separated children have been referred to receive assistance in obtaining reunification support services.
- Conducted outreach engagements, including online videos,² to expand public awareness on how to begin the reunification process.
- Published in the *Federal Register* a request for public input on recommendations for how to minimize the separation of migrant parents and legal guardians and children entering the United States in the future, consistent with the law.³
- Reached 144 families outside of the United States and registered 124 of them through the Department of State's (DoS) Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration's (PRM) project with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Kids in Need of Defense (KIND).
- Continued working with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to develop a clear recommendation on future behavioral health services for reunited families. The existing contract was extended three months until April 10, 2022 to avoid a lapse in services.
- Continued to engage with attorneys in settlement negotiations in the *Ms. L. v. ICE*⁴ litigation.

¹ On February 2, 2021, President Biden signed Executive Order 14011 (E.O. 14011), *Establishment of Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families*, which established an Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families to reunite children separated from their parents at the United States-Mexico border between January 20, 2017 and January 20, 2021, in connection with operation of the Zero-Tolerance Policy. E.O. 14011 directs the Task Force to identify children who were separated, to facilitate and enable the reunification of the families and to provide recommendations regarding the provision of additional services and support for the reunified families, including behavioral health services, with a focus on trauma-informed care.

² Family Reunification Task Force Message (2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jBpHogPS1A> (last visited Jan. 14, 2022).

³ Identifying Recommendations to Support the Work of the Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families, 86 Fed. Reg. 70512 (Dec. 10, 2021).

⁴ *Ms. L. v. ICE*, No. 18-cv-0428- DMS (MDD) (S.D. Cal. Mar. 8, 2019).

II. Executive Order Language

On February 2, 2021, President Biden signed Executive Order 14011 (E.O. 14011), *Establishment of Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families*. The Executive Order requires regular reports to the President, including:

- (i) an initial progress report no later than 120 days after the date of this order;
- (ii) interim progress reports every 60 days thereafter;
- (iii) a report containing recommendations to ensure that the Federal Government will not repeat the policies and practices leading to the separation of families at the border, no later than 1 year after the date of this order; and,
- (iv) a final report when the Task Force has completed its mission.

III. Recent Progress and Ongoing Efforts

The Task Force continues to make progress to improve the pace of family reunifications. Since the last interim progress report, the Task Force conducted multiple outreach efforts to improve public awareness and register families who remain separated. The Task Force started notifying families living in the United States of their option to file for parole-in-place (PIP) with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Additionally, the Task Force announced in the *Federal Register* its collection of public input on how to minimize the separation of migrant parents and legal guardians and children entering the United States in the future, consistent with the law. The Task Force continues to receive registrations from separated families and, as of January 17, 2022, 370 children are now on a path to receive reunification support services for their families.

Supporting Separated Families when They Come Forward

Since the launch of the Task Force website, Together.gov/Juntos.gov, 768 potentially eligible families have registered with the Task Force. For the registrants who appeared to be living outside of the United States, the Task Force referred them to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to complete the parole application process and, if granted parole, schedule travel to the United States. The referred families represent 429 separated children. Of those families, 52 have been granted parole and reunified and 353 are receiving assistance in obtaining reunification support services.

On December 15, 2021, USCIS began accepting PIP applications for separated children, parents, and certain additional family members. USCIS provided training for advocates and legal representatives working with families filing for PIP. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is engaging with the private sector to connect resources to the needs of the separated families in the United States as it does not currently have the authorized funding to pay for IOM support services as it does for families who are outside of the United States.

Through DoS/PRM funding, UNHCR and its implementing partner, KIND, launched a help desk on November 10, 2021 which continues to provide support to families with a telephonic hotline and email account. KIND's Help Desk can answer questions regarding the reunification process, including eligibility and processing, registration requirements, and what return to the United States may mean for separated families. The Help Desk assists separated families outside of the United States with registration on Together.gov/Juntos.gov and provides external referrals for services and support, as needed. The Help Desk operates weekdays from 10:00 am to 7:00 pm Central America time, and is currently staffed by five dedicated attorneys as well as additional project staff who support both the Help Desk and targeted direct outreach to separated parents. Interpretation is available in eleven languages, including several indigenous languages. To date, the Help Desk has engaged with callers from five countries speaking nine different languages.

Separated parents and children who face acute risks to their physical safety in-country as they await travel arrangements to the United States are being referred to UNHCR for protection services. It is expected that risks to families may increase alongside awareness of the

reunification process, as families may be targeted once it is known they may be traveling to the United States.

Increasing Outreach Efforts to Improve Public Awareness

To increase public awareness, build trust, and encourage separated families to come forward, the Task Force published a message⁵ on DHS’s YouTube channel about its work to reunite separated families. Following the release of the video, online conversations and mentions about the Task Force on social media platforms increased significantly. There was a 111 percent increase in total mentions of the Task Force, a 1,233 percent increase in total reach, and a 208 percent change in new mentions when compared to the prior week’s analysis of conversations and mentions of the Task Force on social media platforms. As of January 21, 2022, the video has garnered a total of 616 views. In addition, the Task Force conducted an interview with a Spanish speaking news outlet to magnify its reach to inform additional parents about the options and process for reunification. This interview was picked up by five other news outlets, three of which were also Spanish speaking news entities.

Publishing in the Federal Register for Public Input

On December 10, 2021, the Task Force published in the *Federal Register* a request for public input on its recommendations on how to minimize the separation of migrant parents and legal guardians and children entering the United States in the future, consistent with the law.⁶ As part of E.O. 14011, the Task Force must provide the President with recommendations on how to prevent future family separations, except in the most extreme circumstances where a separation is clearly necessary for the safety and well-being of the child or is required by law. The Task Force extended the comment period to allow the public more time to provide input on its recommendations. The Task Force looks forward to reviewing the comments and incorporating the public feedback into its recommendations to the President.

Locating Families and Explaining Reunification Options

The DoS/PRM project with UNHCR and KIND continued making progress in contacting families outside of the United States and registering them for reunification services. In this reporting period, the project reached 144 separated families with education on the reunification process and 124 were registered on Together.gov/Juntos.gov. Cumulatively from September 1, 2021 through January 9, 2022, the project reached 393 families and registered 307. More than 3,000 attempts to contact families were made in this same period.

In addition to referrals to KIND of eligible separated parents, KIND continues to work off of the contact lists that the *Ms. L.* Steering Committee provided, representing 713 separated parents without a confirmed reunification. As of mid-December 2021, KIND had attempted contact with 552 separated parents from these lists. In addition, there are an additional 14 parents on the lists

⁵ Family Reunification Task Force Message (2022), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8jBpHogPS1A> (last visited Jan. 21, 2022).

⁶ Identifying Recommendations To Support the Work of the Interagency Task Force on the Reunification of Families, 86 Fed. Reg. 70512 (Dec. 10, 2021).

who independently registered before KIND could reach out to them, leaving a total of 147 parents remaining to be contacted from those lists. KIND estimates they will have attempted initial contact with all 713 separated parents by February 18, 2022.

KIND will attempt to contact any new referrals received, as well as continue follow-up outreach with families they have attempted to contact but have not yet reached successfully or are not yet registered. KIND will continue with this approach throughout the remainder of the 12-month project term.

KIND's partner Justice in Motion (JiM) began on-the-ground searches for families that JiM was best positioned to reach, or that KIND was unable to reach by phone. JiM located 57 parents by mid-December 2021, and KIND has made 28 additional referrals to JiM for on-the-ground searches for families that KIND was unable to reach by phone. JiM has initiated those 28 additional on-the-ground searches, which are ongoing.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) continue to search for previously separated families and are working with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and IOM to see if additional contact information can be found. The ACLU and NGOs are also working with the American Red Cross, to provide support and assistance in identifying and locating previously separated parents and children. The American Red Cross' efforts may prove integral in finding families who remain difficult to locate where little is known about their whereabouts.

Improving the Availability of Behavioral Health Services

The existing behavioral health services contract was extended three months to April 10, 2022. This extension will allow the Task Force to continue to work with SAMHSA to develop a clear recommendation on future behavioral health services for reunited families. In addition, the Task Force is working with HHS to support its recommendations regarding the provision of additional services and support to the families, including trauma-informed, culturally appropriate behavioral health case management and clinical services; parenting support and psychoeducation; and pre-reunification counseling.

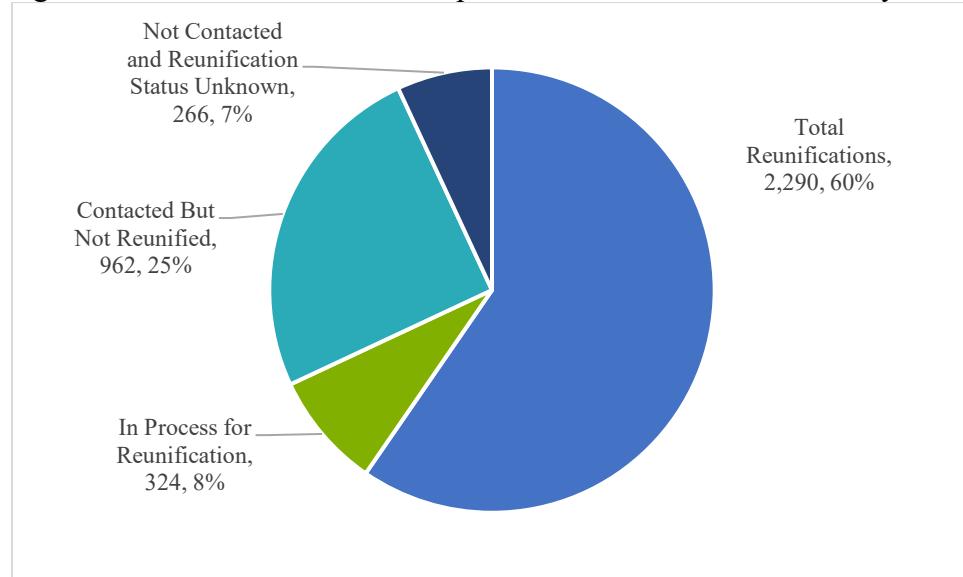
Impact of Settlement Negotiations

The Task Force continues to consult with the Department of Justice (DOJ) on the *Ms. L. v. ICE* litigation, and settlement negotiations continue. These settlement negotiations are confidential, thereby limiting the Task Force's ability to speak publicly on its work. The Task Force anticipates that settlement negotiations will continue and once finalized, will support many of the directives of E.O. 14011.

IV. Update on Task Force Data

During this reporting period, the Task Force made several improvements on building an integrated request and case management system for separated families. These developments enhanced the Task Force's monitoring and reporting capabilities. As of January 17, 2022, the Task Force identified 3,842 children within the scope of E.O. 14011.⁷ The Task Force has reunified, through close coordination with the NGOs and attorneys representing the separated families, 106 children with their parents, bringing the total number of known reunified children to 2,290. There are 324 children who are in the process of being reunified by the Task Force.⁸ There are an additional 1,228 children where the Task Force has not confirmed reunification with their parents and who are not currently in the process of being reunified.

Figure 1: Status of Contact with Separated and Reunified Families by Child



Source: DHS and records related to the *Ms. L.* and *Ms. J.P.* litigation.⁹

⁷ The number of in scope separations can increase or decrease over time due to the Task Force's continuous effort to refine and improve its data and tracking of prior family separations.

⁸ Please see Appendix A, Figure 1 for a comparison of reunification data reported in this report with the reunification data reported in the November 29, 2021 Interim Progress Report.

⁹ *Ms. L. v. ICE*, No. 18-cv-0428- DMS (MDD) (S.D. Cal. Mar. 8, 2019); *J.P. v. Sessions*, No. 2:18-cv-06081 (C.D. Cal) (Nov. 5, 2019).

V. Update on Parole Requests

The Task Force is using DHS's parole authority to permit separated families, on a case-by-case basis, to enter or remain in the United States for purposes of reunification and to receive access to services. As of January 17, 2022, a total of 537 parole requests have been filed by separated children, parents, and additional family members with USCIS. The average processing time is 50 days, despite the increased demand caused by parole requests filed by Afghan nationals seeking to come to the United States.

IOM continues to support separated families with in-country processing, including completing the parole request application to be filed with USCIS and, once parole is approved, obtaining required travel documents, such as passports and exit visas. As of January 17, 2022, IOM has 370 separated children in its processing queue.¹⁰ To date, IOM has received requests from families residing in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Brazil, the Russian Federation, and Venezuela, with the majority being from Guatemala.

In the prior progress report, the Task Force referenced its announcement of a process for separated families who are in the United States who have not been admitted to the United States to request PIP. During this reporting period, the Task Force started providing registrants who appear eligible for this process information on how to request PIP from USCIS. No PIP requests have been filed at this time.

DHS does not have authorized funding to pay for support services for families filing PIP; however, it is engaging with the private sector to connect resources to the needs of the separated families. On January 19, 2022 USCIS provided training to advocates and NGOs on the PIP request process, and the Task Force continues to work closely with the ACLU and the NGO community to coordinate and communicate the process.

¹⁰ A portion of separated children are considered reunified with a parent prior to Task Force establishment. See Appendix A, Figure 1 for more detail.

VI. Appendix:

Figure 1: Family Reunification Task Force Data for Separated Children Updated from the November 29, 2021 Report

Data Tracking Separated Children and Reunifications	September 30 Report	November 29 Report ¹¹	January 28 Report ¹²
In Scope for Task Force Support	3,948	3,951	3,842
Children Identified as Returned to Home Country	410	410	385
Parents Identified as Returned to Their Home Country	1,707	1,710	1,643
Total Reunifications	2,221	2,248	2,290
<i>Reunifications Prior to Task Force Establishment</i>	2,171	2,187	2,184
<i>Task Force Reunifications</i>	50	61	106
Remaining Children Without Confirmed Reunification	1,727	1,703	1,552
<i>In Process for Reunification</i>	50	206	324
<i>Contact Information Available but Not Reunified</i>	1,296	1,217	962
<i>No Confirmed Contact Information Available and Reunification Status Unknown</i>	381	280	266

Source: DHS and records related to the *Ms. L.* and *Ms. J.P.* litigation.¹³

The Task Force data is continuously changing due to various efforts that include reviewing U.S. government datasets, contacting separated families, and learning about previously unknown family reunifications. As a result, numbers will increase and decrease from one report to the next, which should not be interpreted as a lack of progress. Learning about the status of separated families brings the Task Force closer to achieving its mandate to identify all separated children and enable and facilitate the reunification of all eligible families.

¹¹ Data as of November 17, 2021.

¹² Data as of January 17, 2022.

¹³ *Ms. L. v. ICE*, No. 18-cv-0428- DMS (MDD) (S.D. Cal. Mar. 8, 2019); *J.P. v. Sessions*, No. 2:18-cv-06081 (C.D. Cal) (Nov. 5, 2019).